

Taking the Tests: » Prepare For Test Day

Countdown To Test Day: A Checklist

Get Psyched Up Not Psyched Out

By now you've probably had all sorts of preparation for taking the SAT or ACT, everything from the lessons you learned at school - all that math homework is finally going to pay off -- to advice from teachers and tips from older students on how to handle the test. What you might not know is that there are a few simple things you can do before the test that can help you do your best.

Come test day, you'll want to be free of distractions and have a clear head. The more you can focus on the test, the more likely you are to turn in the best performance you're capable of delivering. The tips on this page will take you a long way toward doing just that.

Get a good night's sleep. This doesn't mean you have to get in bed the moment the sun goes down -- unless this is what you normally do -- but make an effort to hit the sack in time to get a good, solid eight hours of shut eye the night before you're scheduled to take the test. Getting a good night's sleep will help you stay alert and give you the energy you need to think clearly on test day.

Eat breakfast. Don't be distracted by hunger. Trying to calculate the value of x in the equation $x + 4 = 24$ only gets harder when most of your brainpower is focused on the problem of lunch. Eating a decent breakfast will eliminate that problem, and it can help you think better, too. Your brain needs food for fuel just like the rest of your body. Being well nourished before you take the test can help ensure that your brain will have the energy it needs to operate at peak efficiency.

Come prepared. Have everything that you need for the test ready the night before test day. The last thing you need to do is throw yourself into a panic fifteen minutes before you leave for the test center because you forgot where you put your admission ticket, or your calculator, or your ID. Take some time the night before the test to put everything you need in one place.

Use the checklist below to identify some of the more important items. If you like you can use them to create a longer, more personalized list:

- The appropriate ID - Find out what types of ID are acceptable.
- Admission ticket
- Several No. 2 pencils
- Calculator with fresh batteries (Find out what type of calculator you can bring to the test center.)

Once you've gathered up what you need, think about putting everything in your backpack or purse, or even in the car if you're driving to the test center. Then, when it's time to hit the road, you won't have to waste precious time or mental energy searching for the things you need.

You may also want to add items such as car keys, bus fare, or directions to the test site to the list. Just make sure you have everything you need, ready to go, the night before you're supposed to leave.

Make sure you know the way to the test center and any special instructions for finding the entrance on Saturday or Sunday. On test day, you need to be thinking about the test, not how to get to the test center. While you still have a couple of days before the test, make sure that you or the person driving you either knows how to get to the test center or has directions to the test center. It's important to do this several days in advance. That way, if you or your driver needs directions, you'll have plenty of time to get them from a reliable source. If you're taking an unfamiliar train or a bus route, consider making an advance trip.

Leave yourself plenty of time to get to the test site. Make sure to add extra minutes to your expected travel time, padding it for mishaps and traffic jams. You'll also want to make sure you arrive at the test center early enough to find the room where you'll be taking the test, particularly if you're taking the test in a building you've never been to before. And if you're driving, leave yourself plenty of time to find a parking space.

Acceptable Identification

Acceptable identification is required for admission to the test center. It must include a photograph or physical description (written in English), your name, and your signature. Examples are:

- your driver's license with recognizable photo
- school identification card with recognizable photo
- valid passport with current, recognizable photo
- Talent Identification Program ID Authorization To Test Form (grades 7 and 8)
- a brief physical description of yourself, written on school stationery, that you must sign in the presence of your principal or school counselor, who must also sign it.

Unacceptable ID includes:

- social security card
- credit card (including one with photo)
- parent's driver's license
- birth certificate (including wallet-size birth certificates)

If you do not take acceptable ID to the test center, you will not be permitted to test. Students testing in Ghana and Nigeria: In addition to the Admission Ticket, you must present a valid passport containing your signature and a current, recognizable photo, or a letter written in English verifying your identity.

Students testing in India and Pakistan: You must present your passport containing your signature and a current, recognizable photo. No other form of ID will be accepted.

Calculator Tips

1. Bring a calculator with you when you take the SAT or ACT, even if you're not sure if you will use it. Calculators will not be available at the test center.
2. If you don't use a calculator regularly, you may want to practice on the calculator you plan to use before the test.
3. All questions on the test can be answered without a calculator. No questions will require complicated or tedious calculations.

4. Don't buy an expensive, sophisticated calculator just to take the test. You'll only need basic functions. More sophisticated calculators are allowed so people who already have them don't have to buy a new one.
5. Don't try to use a calculator on every question. Use your good judgment in determining when to use the calculator.
6. Use common sense. The calculator is meant to aid you in problem solving, not to get in the way.
7. It may help to do scratch work in the test book, in order to get your thoughts down on paper before you use your calculator.
8. Make sure your calculator is in good working order and that batteries (if needed) are fresh. If your calculator fails during the test, you'll need to complete the test without it.

Test Taking Advice

Stay Focused on Test Day Your SAT or ACT scores depend on how much you know, but they also depend upon how well you can apply what you know. If you're nervous, distracted, or in a bad mood on test day, you may have a hard time concentrating and bringing the full force of your smarts to bear. And that can have a negative impact on your scores.

Here are some basic tips to help you control your nerves on test day.

Think Positively

Getting down on yourself during the test does more than make you feel bad. It can rob you of the confidence you need to solve problems. If you're busy worrying about how well you're doing, then you aren't busy thinking about the question in front of you. Remember, you're ready for this. All those years of school have prepared you to do a great job. Just concentrate and keep moving. You'll do fine.

Keep Yourself Focused

Try not to think about anything except the question in front of you. If you catch yourself thinking about something else, take a deep breath and bring your focus back to the test. And give yourself a pat on the back -- you've just demonstrated that you are in control.

Concentrate On Your Own Work

The first thing some students do when they get stuck on a question or find themselves running into a batch of tough questions is to look around to see how everyone else is doing. And what they usually see is discouraging: other students filling in their answer sheets.

You may think to yourself, "Look at how well everyone else is doing. What's wrong with me?" If you do start thinking this way, try to remember:

- Everyone works at a different pace. Your neighbors may not be working on the same question that has puzzled you. (Who knows, they may get stuck on it, too, when they get to that question!)
- Thinking about what someone else is doing doesn't help you answer even a single question. In fact, it takes away time you should be using on the test. Don't get concerned about what other people are doing. Just concentrate on doing the best job you can do.

Put The Test In Perspective

The SAT is important, but how you do on one test will not determine whether you get into college. The test is only one factor in the college admission decision, and the fact is, most college admission officers consider high school grades more important than your SAT score. Also, nonacademic criteria -- like your extracurricular activities and personal recommendations -- are important, too. And remember, if you don't do as well as you had hoped, you can always take the test again.

Remember, You're In Control

Developing a plan for tackling the SAT will help you feel more in control during the test itself. Even if test day is tomorrow, there's still time to familiarize yourself with the test directions and to review the different question types so you won't have to spend time doing so during the test. If you're planning ahead, then there are many resources you can use to prepare for the SAT.

If You're In Control, You'll Have The Best Chance Of Getting All The Points You Deserve!

Test Day Checklist

What To Pack -- And Leave Behind -- On Exam Day

As if you didn't have enough to think about on exam day, here are a few more things to remember. It wouldn't hurt to take a look at your AP Bulletin for Students and Parents, either, which has all this information and more.

Bring to the exam:

- several sharpened No. 2 pencils (with erasers) for the multiple-choice answer sheets
- black or dark-blue ballpoint pens for the free-response questions in most exams
- your secondary school code number (if you are homeschooled, you will be given a code on testing day)
- your social security number; while it is not mandatory for you to provide it, it is used for identification and appears on your AP Grade Report
- a watch (in case your exam room doesn't have a clock you can see easily)
- calculators for Calculus, Chemistry, Physics, and Statistics exams (see the AP Bulletin for Students & Parents or the AP Subject List for what's allowed and what's recommended)
- rulers or straightedges (optional) for the Physics exams only
- a photo I.D. (if you are homeschooled or do not attend the school where you are taking the exam)

Don't bring:

- books, compasses, correction fluid, dictionaries, highlighters, or notes; or, except as noted above, calculators, rulers, and straightedges
- scratch paper (you can make notes on portions of the exam booklets)
- typewriting equipment or computers (except as noted in the Bulletin)
- watches that beep or have an alarm

- portable listening or recording devices - even with headphones (leave your radios and CD players at home!)
- beepers, personal data assistants (PDAs), or cellular phones
- food or drinks
- clothing (t-shirts, for example) with subject-related information

Exam Security

There's a lot of information about exam security printed in the Bulletin, and you should familiarize yourself with it before you take an AP Exam. However, it all boils down to two words - DON'T CHEAT. It's not worth running the risk of having your grade canceled.

Calculators

We recommend that you bring a calculator to use on the math sections of the SAT I. No questions on the SAT I require a calculator, but we recognize that calculators are widely used in schools, and we want you to have the option of using a calculator on the test. Research shows that students who use calculators on the SAT I do slightly better than students who do not. That's because the use of a calculator tends to ensure that students who apply sound math reasoning will not miss a question because of computational errors.

Types of calculators permitted:

Almost any four-function, scientific, or graphing calculator.

Types of calculators NOT permitted:

- hand-held minicomputers or laptop computers
- electronic writing pads or pen-input devices
- pocket organizers
- calculators with QWERTY (typewriter-like) keypads
- calculators with paper tape
- calculators that "talk" or make an unusual noise
- calculators that require an electrical outlet

If you use a calculator with a large (characters one inch or taller) or raised display that might be visible to other test takers, you will be seated at the discretion of the test supervisor.

You won't be able to share calculators. Test takers who share calculators or exchange information during the exam will be dismissed and/or have their scores canceled.

Students who remove part of a test book or any notes relating to the test (on paper or a calculator or in any other electronic form) may be dismissed from the testing room and/or have their scores canceled.